

respect ability

FIGHTING STIGMAS. ADVANCING OPPORTUNITIES.

RespectAbility

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To: Members and Staff, Washington Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board

From: Staff, Board, and Apprentices of RespectAbility

Re: Public Comments for February 23, 2023 Meeting

Dear Co-Chair Chandler, Co-Chair Brown, and Board Members:

Thank you for the opportunity to offer our comments for the Washington State Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board's February 2023 meeting. RespectAbility is a nonpartisan, nonprofit disability inclusion organization dedicated to fighting stigmas and advancing opportunities for the more than 60 million Americans with disabilities. This is America's largest minority group and one that anyone could join due to aging, illness, or accident. In 2020 in Washington State, there was an estimated 1,273,876 people with disabilities.

Respectability makes the following policy recommendations based on our expertise in recruiting and employing people with disabilities, for Washington to improve outcomes for workers with disabilities:

Parity for people with disabilities in the labor market

- ***Focus on closing the gap in labor force participation rates between Washingtonians with and without disabilities:*** In 2020, Washington's employment rate for all working-age people with disabilities in America was 44.5 percent, compared to 75.7 percent of people without disabilities. An increase in labor force participation amongst people with disabilities would be a significant benefit for employers struggling with labor shortages.
- ***Ensure that all Washington workforce programs are inclusive to people with disabilities:*** There are more than 60 million people nationwide with some a disability, including both hidden and apparent disabilities. Washington employers will benefit tremendously from building a recruitment and workforce culture that empowers this key demographic. Establishing this culture and leading with best practices ensure people with disabilities remain in the workforce.
- ***Close the gap in high school and college graduation rates:*** In Washington's K-12 public schools, there are more than 143,000 students with disabilities. The gap in graduation rates between students with and without disabilities continues to undermine their futures.

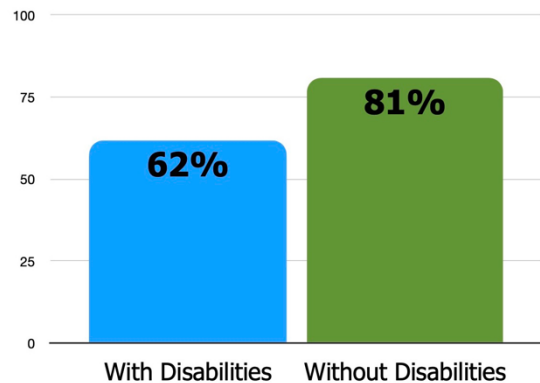
Critically, among the class of 2019, the high school graduation rate for students with disabilities was only 62 percent, compared to 81 percent of students without disabilities. This means that thousands of students with disabilities are leaving Washington's school system with uncertain prospects in the workforce.

- **Employment Transition Services**

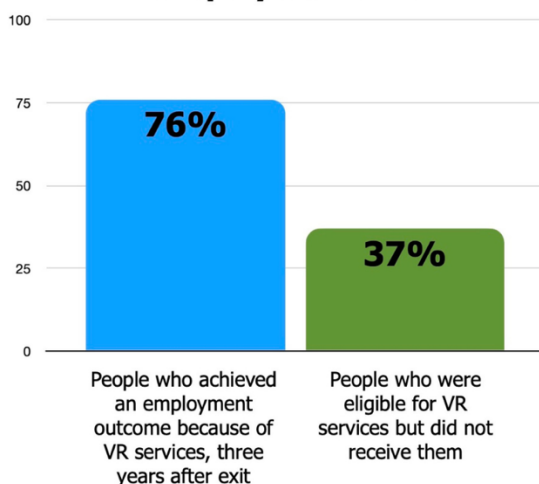
The National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS2) found that among youth with disabilities who had been out of high school 1 to 4 years, 58 percent worked full time at their current or most recent job (Newman et al., 2009). In contrast, almost 80 percent of transition-aged youth without a disability and not enrolled in high school were employed (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2017). RespectAbility supports robust investment in Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) programs since data demonstrates that it is cost-effective and successful.

The U.S. Department of Education found that among persons who achieved an employment outcome because of VR services, 76 percent were still working three years after exit compared to 37 percent of people who were eligible for VR services but did not receive them (Hayward & Schmidt-Davis, 2003).

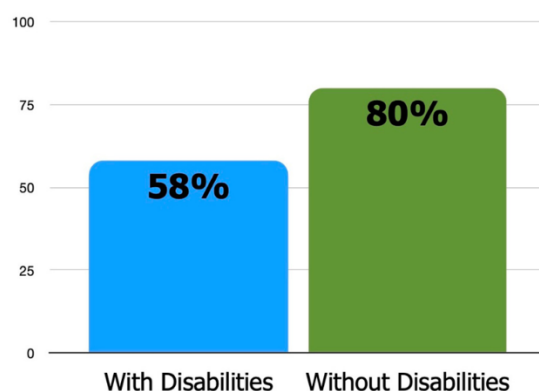
Washington State Graduation Rate



Employment Rate



Employment Rate Among Transition-Aged Youth Not Enrolled in High School



- **Nothing About Us Without Us**

We have found that underrepresented populations are often left out of the policy decisions that affect them most. The Washington State Legislature has introduced two bills on this topic in 2023, [Senate Bill 5616](#) and [House Bill 1541](#). As a disability led nonprofit, RespectAbility ardently encourages the board to proactively recruit underrepresented populations with lived experiences into its membership and to collaborate with other public and private entities to do the same.

If you have any questions or would like to follow-up on our recommendations, please contact Manager of State Policy Jimmy Fremgen, (202-517-6272).